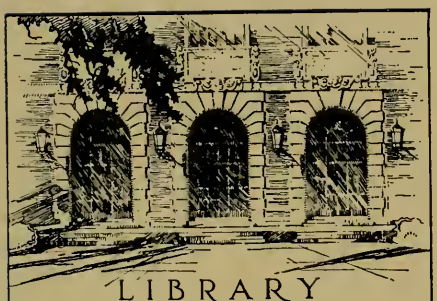

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MR. J. S. MILL

UPON

PERSONAL REPRESENTATION.

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1884.

MR. J. S. MILL

UPON

PERSONAL REPRESENTATION.

Of True and False Democracy: Representation of All and Representation of the Majority only.*

It has been seen that the dangers incident to a representative democracy are of two kinds: danger of a low grade of intelligence in the representative body, and in the popular opinion which controls it; and danger of class legislation on the part of the numerical majority, these being all composed of the same class. We have next to consider how far it is possible so to organise the democracy, as, without interfering materially with the characteristic benefits of democratic government, to do away with these two great evils, or at least to abate them in the utmost degree attainable by human contrivance.

The common mode of attempting this is by limiting the democratic character of the representation, through a more or less restricted suffrage. But there is a previous consideration which, duly kept in view, considerably modifies the circumstances which are supposed to render such a restriction necessary. A completely equal democracy, in a nation in which a single class composes the numerical majority, cannot be divested of certain evils; but those

* Reprinted from "Considerations on Representative Government." Chapter VII. The elaborate discussion of the details of Mr. Hare's scheme contained in this chapter, and a few other remarks, has been omitted, as only partially applicable to the present state of the question.

evils are greatly aggravated by the fact that the democracies which at present exist are not equal, but systematically unequal, in favour of the predominant class.

Two very different ideas are usually confounded under the name democracy. The pure idea of democracy, according to its definition, is the government of the whole people by the whole people, equally represented. Democracy, as commonly conceived and hitherto practised, is the government of the whole people by a mere majority of the people, exclusively represented. The former is synonymous with the equality of all citizens; the latter, strangely confounded with it, is a government of privilege, in favour of the numerical majority, who alone possess practically any voice in the State. This is the inevitable consequence of the manner in which the votes are now taken, to the complete disfranchisement of minorities.

The confusion of ideas here is great, but it is so easily cleared up, that one would suppose the slightest indication would be sufficient to place the matter in its true light before any mind of average intelligence. It would be so, but for the power of habit; owing to which the simplest idea, if unfamiliar, has as great difficulty in making its way to the mind as a far more complicated one. That the minority must yield to the majority, the smaller number to the greater, is a familiar idea; and accordingly men think there is no necessity for using their minds any further, and it does not occur to them that there is any medium between allowing the smaller number to be equally powerful with the greater, and blotting out the smaller number altogether. In a representative body actually deliberating, the minority must, of course, be overruled; and in an equal democracy (since the opinions of the constituents, when they insist on them, determine those of the representative body) the majority of the people, through their representatives, will outvote and prevail over the minority and their representatives. But does it follow that the minority should have no representatives at all? Because the majority ought to prevail over the minority,

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must the majority have all the votes, the minority none? Is it necessary that the minority should not even be heard? Nothing but habit and old association can reconcile any reasonable being to the needless injustice. In a really equal democracy, every or any section would be represented, not disproportionately, but proportionately. A majority of the electors would always have a majority of the representatives; but a minority of the electors would always have a minority of the representatives. Man for man, they would be as fully represented as the majority. Unless they are, there is not equal government, but a government of inequality and privilege: one part of the people rule over the rest: there is a part whose fair and equal share of influence in the representation is withheld from them, contrary to all just government, but above all, contrary to the principle of democracy, which professes equality as its very root and foundation.

The injustice and violation of principle are not less flagrant because those who suffer by them are a minority; for there is not equal suffrage where every single individual does not count for as much as any other single individual in the community. But it is not only a minority who suffer. Democracy, thus constituted, does not even attain its ostensible object, that of giving the powers of government in all cases to the numerical majority. It does something very different: it gives them to a majority of a majority, who may be, and often are, but a minority of the whole. All principles are most effectually tested by extreme cases. Suppose, then, that in a country governed by equal and universal suffrage, there is a contested election in every constituency, and every election is carried by a small majority. The Parliament thus brought together represents little more than a bare majority of the people. This Parliament proceeds to legislate, and adopts important measures by a bare majority of itself. What guarantee is there that these measures accord with the wishes of a majority of the people? Nearly half the electors, having been outvoted at the hustings, have had no influence at all

in the decision; and the whole of these may be—a majority of them probably are—hostile to the measures, having voted against those by whom they have been carried. Of the remaining electors nearly half have chosen representatives who, by supposition, have voted against the measures. It is possible, therefore, and not at all improbable, that the opinion which has prevailed was agreeable only to a minority of the nation, though a majority of that portion of it whom the institutions of the country have erected into a ruling class. If democracy means the certain ascendancy of the majority, there are no means of insuring that but by allowing every individual figure to tell equally in the summing up. Any minority left out, either purposely or by the play of the machinery, gives the power, not to the majority, but to a minority in some other part of the scale.

The only answer which can possibly be made to this reasoning is that as different opinions predominate in different localities, the opinion which is in a minority in some places has a majority in others, and, on the whole, every opinion which exists in the constituencies obtains its fair share of voices in the representation. And this is roughly true in the present state of the constituency; if it were not, the discordance of the House with the general sentiment of the country would soon become evident. But it would be no longer true if the present constituency were much enlarged; still less, if made co-extensive with the whole population; for in that case the majority in every locality would consist of manual labourers; and when there was any question pending on which these classes were at issue with the rest of the community, no other class could succeed in getting represented anywhere. Even now, is it not a great grievance, that in every Parliament a very numerous portion of the electors, willing and anxious to be represented, have no member in the House for whom they have voted? Is it just that every elector of Marylebone is obliged to be represented by two nominees of the vestries; every elector

of Finsbury or Lambeth by those (as is generally believed) of the publicans? The constituencies to which most of the highly educated and public spirited persons in the country belong, those of the large towns, are now, in great part, either unrepresented or misrepresented. The electors who are on a different side in party politics from the local majority are unrepresented. Of those who are on the same side a large proportion are misrepresented; having been obliged to accept the man who had the greatest number of supporters in their political party, though his opinions may differ from theirs on every other point. The state of things is, in some respects, even worse than if the minority were not allowed to vote at all; for then, at least, the majority might have a member who would represent their own best mind, while now, the necessity of not dividing the party, for fear of letting in its opponents, induces all to vote either for the first person who presents himself wearing their colours, or for the one brought forward by their local leaders; and these, if we pay them the compliment, which they very seldom deserve, of supposing their choice to be unbiassed by their personal interests, are compelled, that they may be sure of mustering their whole strength, to bring forward a candidate whom none of the party will strongly object to—that is, a man without any distinctive peculiarity, any known opinions except the shibboleth of the party. This is strikingly exemplified in the United States, where, at the election of President, the strongest party never dares put forward any of its strongest men, because every one of these, from the mere fact that he has been long in the public eye, has made himself objectionable to some portion or other of the party, and is, therefore, not so sure a card for rallying all their votes as a person who has never been heard of by the public at all until he is produced as the candidate. Thus the man who is chosen, even by the strongest party, represents perhaps the real wishes only of the narrow margin by which that party outnumbers the other. Any section whose support is necessary to success, possesses a veto on the candidate.

Any section which holds out more obstinately than the rest can compel all the others to adopt its nominee; and this superior pertinacity is unhappily more likely to be found among those who are holding out for their own interest than for that of the public. The choice of the majority is, therefore, very likely to be determined by that portion of the body who are the most timid, the most narrow-minded and prejudiced, or who cling most tenaciously to the exclusive class-interest; in which case the electoral rights of the minority, while useless for the purposes for which votes are given, serve only for compelling the majority to accept the candidate of the weakest or worst portion of themselves.

That, while recognising these evils, many should consider them as the necessary price paid for a free government, is in no way surprising: it was the opinion of all the friends of freedom, up to a recent period. But the habit of passing them over as irremediable has become so inveterate, that many persons seem to have lost the capacity of looking at them as things which they would be glad to remedy if they could. From despairing of a cure, there is too often but one step to denying the disease; and from this follows dislike to having a remedy proposed, as if the proposer were creating a mischief instead of offering relief from one. People are so inured to the evils, that they feel as if it were unreasonable, if not wrong, to complain of them. Yet, avoidable or not, he must be a purblind lover of liberty on whose mind they do not weigh, who would not rejoice at the discovery that they could be dispensed with. Now, nothing is more certain than that the virtual blotting-out of the minority is no necessary or natural consequence of freedom; that, far from having any connection with democracy, it is diametrically opposed to the first principle of democracy, representation in proportion to numbers. It is an essential part of democracy that minorities should be adequately represented. No real democracy, nothing but a false show of democracy, is possible without it.

Those who have seen and felt in some degree the force

of these considerations, have proposed various expedients by which the evil may be in a greater or less degree mitigated. Lord John Russell, in one of his Reform Bills, introduced a provision that certain constituencies should return three members, and that in these each elector should be allowed to vote only for two. . . . Others have proposed that each elector should be allowed to vote only for one. . . . The same result might be attained in a still better way if, as proposed in an able pamphlet by Mr. James Garth Marshall, the elector retained his three votes, but was at liberty to bestow them all upon the same candidate. These schemes, though infinitely better than none at all, are yet but makeshifts, and attain the end in a very imperfect manner, since all local minorities of less than a third, and all minorities, however numerous, which are made up from several constituencies, would remain unrepresented. It is much to be lamented, however, that none of these plans have been carried into effect, as any of them would have recognised the right principle, and prepared the way for its more complete application. But real equality of representation is not obtained unless any set of electors, amounting to the average number of a constituency, wherever in the country they happen to reside, have the power of combining with one another to return a representative. This degree of perfection in representation appeared impracticable until a man of great capacity, fitted alike for large general views and for the contrivance of practical details—Mr. Thomas Hare—had proved its possibility by drawing up a scheme for its accomplishment, embodied in a Draft of an Act of Parliament: a scheme which has the almost unparalleled merit of carrying out a great principle of government in a manner approaching to ideal perfection, as regards the special object in view, while it attains incidentally several other ends of scarcely inferior importance.

The natural tendency of representative government, as of modern civilisation, is towards collective mediocrity: and this tendency is increased by all reductions and extensions of the

franchise, their effect being to place the principal power in the hands of classes more and more below the highest level of instruction in the community. But though the superior intellects and characters will necessarily be outnumbered, it makes a great difference whether or not they are heard. In the false democracy which, instead of giving representation to all, gives it only to the local majorities, the voice of the instructed minority may have no organs at all in the representative body. It is an admitted fact that in the American democracy, which is constructed on this faulty model, the highly-cultivated members of the community, except such of them as are willing to sacrifice their own opinions and modes of judgment, and become the servile mouthpieces of their inferiors in knowledge, seldom even offer themselves for Congress or the State Legislatures, so little likelihood have they of being returned. Had a plan like Mr. Hare's by good fortune suggested itself to the enlightened and patriotic founders of the American Republic, the Federal and State Assemblies would have contained many of these distinguished men, and democracy would have been spared its greatest reproach and one of its most formidable evils. Against this evil the system of personal representation, proposed by Mr. Hare, is almost a specific. The minority of instructed minds, scattered through the local constituencies, would unite to return a number, proportioned to their own numbers, of the very ablest men the country contains. They would be under the strongest inducement to choose such men, since in no other mode could they make their small numerical strength tell for anything considerable. The representatives of the majority, besides that they would themselves be improved in quality by the operation of the system, would no longer have the whole field to themselves. They would indeed outnumber the others, as much as the one class of electors outnumbers the other in the country: they could always outvote them, but they would speak and vote in their presence, and subject to their criticism. When any difference arose, they would have to meet the arguments of the instructed few by reasons, at

least apparently, as cogent; and since they could not, as those do who are speaking to persons already unanimous, simply assume that they are in the right, it would occasionally happen to them to become convinced that they were in the wrong. As they would in general be well-meaning (for thus much may reasonably be expected from a fairly-chosen national representation), their own minds would be insensibly raised by the influence of the minds with which they were in contact, or even in conflict. The champions of unpopular doctrines would not put forth their arguments merely in books and periodicals, read only by their own side; the opposing ranks would meet face to face and hand to hand, and there would be a fair comparison of their intellectual strength, in the presence of the country. It would then be found out whether the opinion which prevailed by counting votes, would also prevail if the votes were weighed as well as counted. The multitude have often a true instinct for distinguishing an able man, when he has the means of displaying his ability in a fair field before them. If such a man fails to obtain any portion whatever of his just weight, it is through institutions or usages which keep him out of sight. In the old democracies there were no means of keeping out of sight any able man: the bema was open to him; he needed nobody's consent to become a public adviser. It is not so in a representative government; and the best friends of representative democracy can hardly be without misgivings that the Themistocles or Demosthenes whose counsels would have saved the nation, might be unable during his whole life ever to obtain a seat. But if the presence in the representative assembly can be insured of even a few of the first minds in the country, though the remainder consist only of average minds, the influence of these leading spirits is sure to make itself sensibly felt in the general deliberations, even though they be known to be, in many respects, opposed to the tone of popular opinion and feeling. I am unable to conceive any mode by which the presence of such minds can be so positively insured as by that proposed by Mr. Hare.

This portion of the Assembly would also be the appropriate organ of a great social function, for which there is no provision in any existing democracy, but which in no government can remain permanently unfulfilled without condemning that government to infallible degeneracy and decay. This may be called the function of Antagonism. In every government there is some power stronger than all the rest; and the power which is strongest tends perpetually to become the sole power. Partly by intention and partly unconsciously, it is ever striving to make all other things bend to itself, and is not content while there is anything which makes permanent head against it, any influence not in agreement with its spirit. Yet if it succeeds in suppressing all rival influences, and moulding everything after its own model, improvement in that country is at an end, and decline commences. Human improvement is a product of many factors, and no power ever yet constituted among mankind includes them all: even the most beneficent power only contains in itself some of the requisites of good, and the remainder, if progress is to continue, must be derived from some other source. No community has ever long continued progressive, but while a conflict was going on between the strongest power in the community and some rival power; between the spiritual and temporal authorities; the military or territorial and the industrious classes; the king and the people; the orthodox, and religious reformers. When the victory on either side was so complete as to put an end to the strife, and no other conflict took its place, first stagnation followed and then decay. The ascendancy of the numerical majority is less unjust and, on the whole, less mischievous than many others; but it is attended with the very same kind of dangers, and even more certainly; for when the government is in the hands of One or a Few, the Many are always existent as a rival power, which may not be strong enough ever to control the other, but whose opinion and sentiment are a moral, and even a social, support to all who, either from conviction or contrariety of

interest, are opposed to any of the tendencies of the ruling authority. But when the Democracy is supreme there is no One or Few strong enough for dissentient opinions and injured or menaced interests to lean upon. The great difficulty of democratic government has hitherto seemed to be, how to provide in a democratic society, what circumstances have provided hitherto in all the societies which have maintained themselves ahead of others—a social support, a *point d'appui*, for individual resistance to the tendencies of the ruling power; a protection, a rallying point, for opinions and interests which the ascendant public opinion views with disfavour. For want of such a *point d'appui* the older societies, and all but a few modern ones, either fell into dissolution or became stationary (which means slow deterioration) through the exclusive predominance of a part only of the conditions of social and mental well-being.

Now, this great want the system of Personal Representation is fitted to supply, in the most perfect manner which the circumstances of modern society admit of. The only quarter in which to look for a supplement, or completing corrective, to the instincts of a democratic majority, is the instructed minority; but, in the ordinary mode of constituting democracy, this minority has no organ: Mr. Hare's system provides one. The representatives who would be returned to Parliament by the aggregate of minorities, would afford that organ in its greatest perfection. A separate organisation of the instructed classes, even if practicable, would be invidious, and could only escape from being offensive by being totally without influence. But if the *élite* of these classes formed part of the Parliament, by the same title as any other of its members—by representing the same number of citizens, the same numerical fraction of the national will—their presence could give umbrage to nobody, while they would be in the position of highest vantage, both for making their opinions and counsels heard on all important subjects, and for taking an active part in public business. Their abilities would probably draw to them

more than their numerical share of the actual administration of government; as the Athenians did not confide responsible public functions to Cleon or Hyperbolus (the employment of Cleon at Pylos and Amphipolis was purely exceptional), but Nicias, and Theramenes, and Alcibiades, were in constant employment both at home and abroad, though known to sympathise more with oligarchy than with democracy. The instructed minority would, in the actual voting, count only for their numbers, but as a moral power they would count for much more, in virtue of their knowledge, and of the influence it would give them over the rest. An arrangement better adapted to keep popular opinion within reason and justice, and to guard it from the various deteriorating influences which assail the weak side of democracy, could scarcely by human ingenuity be devised. A democratic people would in this way be provided with what in any other way it would almost certainly miss—leaders of a higher grade of intellect and character than itself. Modern democracy would have its occasional Pericles, and its habitual group of superior and guiding minds.

With all this array of reasons, of the most fundamental character, on the affirmative side of the question, what is there on the negative? Nothing that will sustain examination, when people can once be induced to bestow any real examination upon a new thing. Those, indeed, if any such there be, who, under pretence of equal justice, aim only at substituting the class ascendancy of the poor for that of the rich, will, of course, be unfavourable to a scheme which places both on a level. But I do not believe that any such wish exists at present among the working classes of this country, though I would not answer for the effect which opportunity and demagogic artifices may hereafter have in exciting it. In the United States, where the numerical majority have long been in full possession of collective despotism, they would probably be as unwilling to part with it as a single despot or an aristocracy. But I believe that the English democracy would as yet be content with pro-

tection against the class legislation of others without claiming the power to exercise it in their turn.

Among the ostensible objectors to Mr. Hare's scheme, some profess to think the plan unworkable; but these, it will be found, are generally people who have barely heard of it, or have given it a very slight and cursory examination.

In general, however, objectors cut the matter short by affirming that the people of England will never consent to such a system. What the people of England are likely to think of those who pass such a summary sentence on their capacity of understanding and judgment, deeming it superfluous to consider whether a thing is right or wrong before affirming that they are certain to reject it, I will not undertake to say. For my own part, I do not think that the people of England have deserved to be, without trial, stigmatised as insurmountably prejudiced against anything which can be proved to be good either for themselves or for others. It also appears to me that when prejudices persist obstinately, it is the fault of nobody so much as of those who make a point of proclaiming them insuperable, as an excuse to themselves for never joining in an attempt to remove them. Any prejudice whatever will be insurmountable, if those who do not share it themselves, truckle to it, and flatter it, and accept it as a law of nature. I believe, however, that in this case there is in general, among those who have yet heard of the proposition, no other hostility to it, than the natural and healthy distrust attaching to all novelties which have not been sufficiently canvassed to make generally manifest all the pros and cons of the question. The only serious obstacle is the unfamiliarity: this indeed is a formidable one, for the imagination much more easily reconciles itself to a great alteration in substance, than to a very small one in names and forms. But unfamiliarity is a disadvantage which, when there is any real value in an idea, it only requires time to remove. And in these days of discussion, and generally awakened interest in improvement, what formerly was the work of centuries, often requires only years.

It is curious to observe how the popular line of argument in defence of existing systems veers round, according to the nature of the attack made upon them. Not many years ago it was the favourite argument in support of the then existing system of representation, that under it all "interests" or "classes" were represented. And certainly all interests or classes of any importance ought to be represented—that is, ought to have spokesmen, or advocates, in Parliament. But from thence it was argued that a system ought to be supported which gave to the partial interests, not advocates merely, but the tribunal itself. Now behold the change. Mr. Hare's system makes it impossible for partial interests to have the command of the tribunal, but it ensures them advocates, and for doing even this it is reproached. Because it unites the good points of class representation, and the good points of numerical representation, it is attacked from both sides at once.

But it is not such objections as these that are the real difficulty in getting the system accepted; it is the exaggerated notion entertained of its complexity, and the consequent doubt, whether it is capable of being carried into effect. The only complete answer to this objection would be actual trial. When the merits of the plan shall have become more generally known, and shall have gained for it a wider support among impartial thinkers, an effort should be made to obtain its introduction, experimentally, in some limited field, such as the municipal election of some great town. An opportunity was lost, when the decision was taken to divide the West Riding of Yorkshire for the purpose of giving it four members; instead of trying the new principle, by leaving the constituency undivided, and allowing a candidate to be returned on obtaining, either in first or secondary votes, a fourth part of the whole number of votes given. Such experiments would be a very imperfect test of the worth of the plan; but they would be an exemplification of its mode of working; they would enable people to convince themselves that it is not impracticable; would familiarise them with its machinery, and afford

some materials for judging whether the difficulties which are thought to be so formidable, are real or only imaginary. The day when such a partial trial shall be sanctioned by Parliament, will, I believe, inaugurate a new era of Parliamentary Reform; destined to give to Representative Government a shape fitted to its mature and triumphant period, when it shall have passed through the militant stage in which alone the world has yet seen it.

Speech delivered in the House of Commons, 29th May, 1867.

In Committee upon the Representation of the People Bill Mr. Mill brought forward clauses embodying Mr. Hare's scheme of Representation. The hon. gentleman said :— The proposal to which I am about to call the attention of the House, and which I move as an amendment to the redistribution clauses, because if it were adopted it would itself constitute a complete system of redistribution, has been framed for the purpose of embodying a principle which has not yet been introduced into our discussions—a principle which is overlooked in the practical machinery of our constitution, and disregarded in most of the projects of constitutional reformers, but which I hold, nevertheless, to be most important to the beneficial working of representative government; and if while we are making great changes in our system of representation we omit to engraft this principle upon it, the advantages we obtain by our changes will be very much lessened, and whatever dangers they may be thought to threaten us with will be far greater and more real than they otherwise need be. And this I think I can establish by reasons so clear and conclusive, that, though I cannot expect to obtain at once the assent of the House, I do confidently hope to induce many members of it to take the subject into serious consideration. I cannot, indeed,

hold out as an inducement that the principle I contend for is fitted to be a weapon of attack or defence for any political party. It is neither democratic nor aristocratic—neither Tory, Whig, nor Radical; or, let me rather say, it is all these at once: it is a principle of fair play to all parties and opinions without distinction: it helps no one party or section to bear down others, but is for the benefit of whoever is in danger of being borne down. It is therefore a principle in which all parties might concur, if they prefer permanent justice to a temporary victory; and I believe that what chiefly hinders them is that, as the principle has not yet found its way into the commonplaces of political controversy, many have never heard of it, and many others have heard just enough about it to misunderstand it. In bringing this subject before the House I am bound to prove two things: first, that there is a serious practical evil requiring remedy; and then, that the remedy I propose is practicable, and would be efficacious. I will first speak of the evil. It is a great evil; it is one which exists not only in our own, but in every other representative constitution; we are all aware of it; we all feel and acknowledge it in particular cases; it enters into all our calculations, and bears with a heavy weight upon us all. But as we have always been used to think of it as incurable, we think of it as little as we can; and are hardly aware how greatly it affects the whole course of our affairs, and how prodigious would be the gain to our policy, to our morality, to our civilisation itself, if the evil were susceptible of a remedy. This House and the country are now anxiously engaged, and certainly not a day too soon, in considering what can be done for the unrepresented. We are all discussing how many non-electors deserve to be represented, and in what mode to give them representation. But my complaint is that the electors are not represented. The representation which they seem to have, and which we have been quarrelling about the extension of, is a most imperfect and insufficient representation; and this imperfect and insufficient representation is what

we are offering to the new classes of voters whom we are creating. Just consider. In every Parliament there is an enormous fraction of the whole body of electors who are without any direct representation, consisting of the aggregate of the minorities in all the contested elections, together with we know not what minorities in those which, from the hopelessness of success, have not even been contested. All these electors are as completely blotted out from the constituency, for the duration of that Parliament, as if they were legally disqualified; most of them, indeed, are blotted out indefinitely, for in the majority of cases those who are defeated once are likely to be defeated again. Here, therefore, is a large portion of those whom the constitution intends to be represented, a portion which cannot average less than a third, and may approximate to a half, who are virtually in the position of non-electors.

After pointing out that majorities are often untruly represented, and describing Mr. Hare's plan in detail, Mr. Mill proceeded:—Many will think that I greatly over-estimate the importance of securing to every elector a direct representation, because those who are not represented directly are represented indirectly. If Conservatives are not represented in the Tower Hamlets, or Liberals in West Kent, there are plenty of Conservatives and Liberals returned elsewhere; and those who are defeated may console themselves by the knowledge that their party is victorious in many other places. Their party, yes: but is that all we have to look to? Is representation of parties all we have a right to demand from our representative system? If that were so, we might as well put up three flags inscribed with the words, Tory, Whig, and Radical, and let the electors make their choice among the flags, and when they have voted, let the leaders of the winning party select the particular persons who are to represent it. In this way we should have, I venture to say, an admirable representation of the three parties: all the seats which fell to the lot of each party would be filled by its steadiest and ablest adherents, by those who would not only serve the

party best in the House, but do it most credit with the country. All political parties, merely as such, would be far better represented than they are now, when accidents of personal position have so great a share in determining who shall be the Liberal or who the Conservative member for each place. Why is it, then, that such a system of representation would be intolerable to us? Sir, it is because we look beyond parties; because we care for something besides parties; because we know that the constitution does not exist for the benefit of parties, but of citizens; and we do not choose that all the opinions, feelings, and interests of all the members of the community should be merged in the single consideration of which party shall predominate. We require a House of Commons which shall be a fitting representative of all the feelings of the people, and not merely of their party feelings. We want all the sincere opinions and public purposes which are shared by a reasonable number of electors to be fairly represented here; and not only their opinions, but that they should be able to give effect by their vote to their confidence in particular men. Then why, because it is a novelty, refuse to entertain the only mode in which it is possible to obtain this complete reflection in the House of the convictions and preferences existing in the constituent body—to make the House, what we are so often told that it ought to be, the express image of the nation? By the plan I propose, every elector would have the option of voting for the one British subject who best represented his opinions, and to whom he was most willing to entrust the power of judging for him on subjects on which his opinions were not yet formed. Sir, I have already made the remark, that this proposal is not specially Liberal, nor specially Conservative, but is, in the highest degree, both Liberal and Conservative; and I will substantiate this by showing that it is a legitimate corollary from the distinctive doctrines of both parties. Let me first address myself to Conservatives. What is it that persons of Conservative feelings specially deprecate in a plan of Parliamentary reform? It is the danger that some classes in the nation may be

swamped by other classes. What is it that we are warned against, as the chief among the dangers of democracy? not untruly, as democracy is vulgarly conceived and practised. It is that the single class of manual labourers would, by dint of numbers, outvote all other classes, and monopolise the whole of the Legislature. But by the plan I propose, no such thing could happen; no considerable minority could possibly be swamped; no interest, no feeling, no opinion which numbered in the whole country a few thousand adherents, need be without a representation in due proportion to its numbers. It is true that by this plan a minority would not be equivalent to a majority; a third of the electors could not outvote two-thirds, and obtain a majority of seats; but a third of the electors could always obtain a third of the seats, and these would probably be filled by men above the average in the influence which depends on personal qualities, for the voters who were outnumbered locally would range the whole country for the best candidate, and would elect him without reference to anything but their personal confidence in him; the representatives of the minorities would, therefore, include many men whose opinion would carry weight even with the opposite party. Then, again, it is always urged by Conservatives, and is one of the best parts of their creed, that the legislators of a nation should not all be men of the same stamp—a variety of feelings, interests, and prepossessions should be found in this House—and it should contain persons capable of giving information and guidance on every topic of importance that is likely to arise. This advantage, we are often assured, has really been enjoyed under our present institutions, by which almost every separate class or interest which exists in the country is somehow represented, with one great exception, which we are now occupied in removing—that of manual labour. And this advantage many Conservatives think that we are now in danger of losing. But the plan I propose ensures this variegated character of the representation in a degree never yet obtained, and guarantees its preservation under

any possible extension of the franchise. Even universal suffrage, even the handing over of political predominance to the numerical majority of the whole people, would not then extinguish minorities. Even dissentient opinion would have the opportunity of making itself heard, and heard through the very best and most effective organs it was able to procure. We should not find the rich or the cultivated classes retiring from politics, as we are so often told they do in America, because they cannot present themselves to any body of electors with a chance of being returned. Such of them as were known and respected out of their immediate neighbourhood would be elected in considerable numbers, if not by a local majority, yet by a union of local minorities; and instead of being deterred from offering themselves, it would be the pride and glory of such men to serve in Parliament; for what more inspiring position can there be for any man, than to be selected to fight the up-hill battle of unpopular opinions, in a public arena, against superior numbers? All, therefore, which the best Conservatives chiefly dread in the complete ascendancy of democracy would be, if not wholly removed, at least diminished in a very great degree. These are the recommendations of the plan when looked at on its Conservative side. Let us now look at it in its democratic aspect. I claim for it the support of all democrats, as being the only true realisation of their political principles. What is the principle of democracy? Is it not that everybody should be represented, and that everybody should be represented equally? Am I represented by a member against whom I have voted, and am ready to vote again? Have all the voters an equal voice, when nearly half of them have had their representative chosen for them by the larger half? In the present mode of taking the suffrages nobody is represented but the majority. But that is not the meaning of democracy. Honest democracy does not mean the displacement of one privileged class, and the instalment of another in a similar privilege because it is a more numerous or a poorer class. That would be a mere pretence of democratic

equality. That is not what the working classes want. The working classes demand to be represented, not because they are poor, but because they are human. No working man with whom I have conversed desires that the richer classes should be unrepresented, but only that their representation should not exceed what is due to their numbers; that all classes should have, man for man, an equal amount of representation. He does not desire that the majority should be alone represented. He desires that the majority should be represented by a majority, and the minority by a minority, and he only needs to have it shown to him how this can be done. But I will go further. It is not only justice to the minorities that is here concerned. Unless minorities are counted, the majority which prevails may be but a sham majority. Suppose that on taking a division in this House you compelled a large minority to step aside, and counted no votes but those of the majority; whatever vote you then took would be decided by the majority of that majority. Does not every one see that this would often be deciding it by a minority? The mere majority of a majority may be a minority of the whole. Now, what I have been hypothetically supposing to be done in this House, the present system actually does in the nation. It first excludes the minorities at all the elections. Not a man of them has any voice at all in determining the proceedings of Parliament. Well, now, if the members whom the majorities returned were always unanimous, we should be certain that the majority in the nation had its way. But if the majorities, and the members representing them, are ever divided, the power that decides is but the majority of a majority. Two-fifths of the electors, let us suppose, have failed to obtain any representation. The representatives of the other three-fifths are returned to Parliament, and decide an important question by two to one. Supposing the representatives to express the mind of their constituents, the question has been decided by a bare two-fifths of the nation, instead of a majority of it. Thus the present system is no more just to majorities than to minorities. It

gives no guarantee that it is really the majority that preponderates. A majority of the nation, if it be a majority in the prevailing party, may outnumber and prevail over a real majority in the nation. Majorities are never sure of outnumbering minorities, unless every elector is counted—unless every man's vote is as effective as any other man's in returning a representative. No system but that which I am submitting to the House effects this, because it is the only system under which every vote tells, and every constituency is unanimous. This system, therefore, is equally required by the Conservative and by the Radical creeds. In practice, its chief operation would be in favour of the weakest—of those who were most liable to be outnumbered and oppressed. Under the present suffrage it would operate in favour of the working classes. Those classes form the majority in very few of the constituencies, but they are a large minority in many, and if they amount, say, to a third of the whole electoral body, this system would enable them to obtain a third of the representation. Under any suffrage approaching to universal, it would operate in favour of the propertied and of the most educated classes; and though it would not enable them to outvote the others, it would secure to them, and to the interests they represent, a hearing, and a just share in the representation. I am firmly persuaded, sir, that all parties in this House and in the country, if they could but be induced to give their minds to the consideration of this proposal, would end by being convinced, not only that it is entirely consistent with their distinctive principles, but that it affords the only means by which all that is best in those principles can be practically carried out. It would be a healing, a reconciling measure; softening all political transitions; securing that every opinion, instead of conquering or being conquered by starts and shocks, and passing suddenly from having no power at all in Parliament to having too much, or the contrary, should wax or wane in political power in exact proportion to its growth or decline in the general mind of the country. So perfectly does this system realise

the idea of what a representative government ought to be, that its perfection stands in its way, and is the great obstacle to its success. There is a natural prejudice against everything which professes much; men are unwilling to think that any plan which promises a great improvement in human affairs has not something quackish about it. I cannot much wonder at this prejudice, when I remember that no single number of a daily paper is published whose advertising columns do not contain a score of panaceas for all human ills; when, in addition to all the pamphlets which load our tables, every member of this House, I suppose, daily receives private communications of plans by which the whole of mankind may at one stroke be made rich and prosperous, generally, I believe, by means of paper money. But if this age is fertile in new nonsense, and in new forms of old nonsense, it is an age in which many great improvements in human affairs have really been made. It is also an age in which, whether we will or not, we are entering on new paths; we are surrounded by circumstances wholly without example in history; and the wonder would be if exigencies so new could be dealt with in a completely satisfactory manner by the old means. We should therefore ill discharge our duty if we obstinately refused to look into new proposals. This, sir, is not the mere crotchet of an individual. It has been very few years before the world, but already, by the mere force of reason, it has made important converts among the foremost public writers and public men in Germany, in France, in Switzerland, in Italy, in our Australian colonies, and in the United States. In one illustrious though small commonwealth, that of Geneva, a powerful association has been organised and is at work, under the presidency of one of the most eminent men in the Swiss federation, agitating for the reform of the constitution on this basis. And what in our own country? Why, sir, almost every thinking person I know who has studied this plan, or to whom it has been sufficiently explained, is for giving it at least a trial. Various modes have been suggested

of trying it on a limited scale. With regard to the practical machinery proposed, neither I nor the distinguished author of the plan are wedded to its details, if any better can be devised. If the principle of the plan were admitted, a Committee or a Royal Commission could be appointed to consider and report on the best means of providing for the direct representation of every qualified voter, and we should have a chanceof knowing if the end we have in view could be attained by any better means than those which we suggest. But without some plan of the kind it is impossible to have a representative system really adequate to the exigencies of modern society. In all states of civilisation, and in all representative systems, personal representation would be a great improvement; but, at present, political power is passing, or is supposed to be in danger of passing, to the side of the most numerous and poorest class. Against this class-predominance, as against all other class-predominance, the personal representation of every voter, and therefore the full representation of every minority, is the most valuable of all protections. Those who are anxious for safeguards against the evils they expect from democracy should not neglect the safeguard which is to be found in the principles of democracy itself. It is not only the best safeguard but the surest and most lasting: because it combats the evils and dangers of false democracy by means of the true, and because every democrat who understands his own principles must see and feel its strict and impartial justice.

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